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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 000726

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STATE FOR WHA/AND AND EUR/AGS - VIKMANIS-KELLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL EU VE AU

SUBJECT: FOLLOW UP ON DEMARCHE ON VENEZUELAN NGO SUMATE

REF: STATE 30521

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Gregory E. Phillips. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) EconPolCouns followed up on reftel demarche on March 8, with Rudolf Lennkh, the Austrian MFA's assistant secretary-level Director for the Americas, and DAS-level

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Latin America section head Andreas Melan.

¶2. (C) Lennkh said Austrian Embassy Washington DCM Harald Guenther had met the previous day with WHA DAS Shapiro to deliver the coordinated EU response on the issue. Lennkh said the EU answer consisted of the following points, which he paraphrased:

-- First, the EU shares our concern about the trials of Sumate members, especially because the charges carry the severe categorization of "high treason."

-- Second, EU heads of mission in Caracas were of the opinion that the appellate court decision was itself a good thing, in that it threw out one set of charges. The EU agrees that the levying of new charges is a serious problem.

-- Third, the EU continues to be interested in a continuing exchange of views with the U.S. on the Sumate trials. The EU would like especially to continue to discuss what useful steps the U.S. and EU could take. Lennkh said one avenue could be a focus on holding Venezuela responsible for applying internationally acceptable legal standards.

-- Fourth, the EU wants to pursue close contact between U.S. and EU member state missions in Caracas.

¶3. (C) Melan said Austrian observers had attended the Sumate trials since they began on December 18. There was a strong reaction from the Venezuelan government, he said, but the Austrian representatives made clear that this was a matter of high importance to the EU.

¶4. (C) Melan said it was unclear whether the March 29 trial was a continuation of an ongoing case, or a new trial on new charges. Lennkh said it was clear that the charges and trials were having the effect of blocking Sumate from pursuing its activities. Therefore it was important that the EU and U.S. had made Venezuela "well aware" of their interest in the case.

McCaw